

BERNARD BUFFET LA BAUME

By Mathilde Gubanski



Bernard BUFFET

La Baume – 1997

Oil on canvas, 130 x 89 cm.

Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

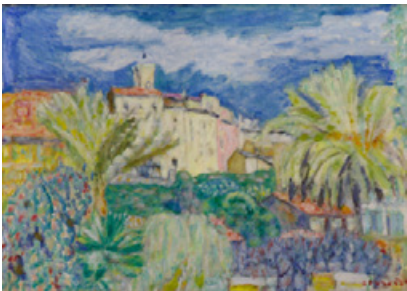
Immersed in the sun-drenched light of the South of France, the Domaine de La Baume is surrounded by nature. A source of inspiration for Bernard Buffet, the Domaine would become the final refuge of this great, tormented artist.

PAINTERS IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

Like many modern painters, Bernard Buffet was fascinated by the colours and light of the South of France. The French region of Provence has long been a haven for artists, with notable examples including Paul Cézanne in Aix-en-Provence, Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin in Arles, Nicolas de Staël in the Luberon, Pierre Bonnard in Le Cannet, and Pablo Picasso and the Côte d'Azur. These painters all shared the same fascination for the region's broad yellow façades, azure blue skies and tall trees with their long shadows. The region has also inspired abstract painters such as Marie Raymond.

Bernard Buffet's son Nicolas has testified to "[his] father's love and infinite gentleness for the culture of the Mediterranean basin.¹" The artist enjoyed a final, peaceful interlude marked by a new lease of inspiration in his beloved Provençal home.

1 - Bernard Buffet *Aujourd'hui* [Bernard Buffet Today], exhibition catalogue, Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris, 2020



Pierre BONNARD
Vue du Cannet [View of Le Cannet] – c. 1927
Oil on canvas, 43,5 x 61 cm.
Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris



Vincent VAN GOGH
La Maison jaune [The Yellow House] – 1888
Oil on canvas, 72 x 91 cm.
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

A TIMELESS RESIDENCE

Bernard Buffet and his family moved to the Domaine de La Baume in 1986. Set in forty hectares of natural surroundings, the Provençal house is located in the village of Tourtour in the Haut-Var. Buffet's move to the house marked the beginning of the final chapter of his life. More isolated than ever before, the artist spent most of his time on the property. The painter was deeply fond of the house, where he felt good and wanted to spend his time. On his time there, his wife Annabel said: "Bernard attaches extreme importance to the place where we live for the good and simple reason that he hardly leaves it. Work and pleasure are concentrated in this place. Only there is he truly himself. Extremely sensitive, Bernard seems to have found a refuge in this exceptional place, where away from a world that confronts him with violence, he can reconnect with his passion for painting, with his taste for the quiet life, especially in his search for serenity.²"

2 - Nicholas Foulkes, *Bernard Buffet: The Invention of the Modern Mega-Artist*, Arrow Books, London, 2016



View of the Domaine de La Baume in Tourtour, Haut-Var

A BIOGRAPHICAL STYLE OF PAINTING

As Buffet spent a lot of time on his property, La Baume naturally became a source of inspiration for the artist, who used it as a subject for his paintings from 1987 to 1997. He painted both exterior views—the façade, the chapel, the fountain, the swimming pool—and interior scenes—the bathroom, the kitchen, etc. Discussing his paintings of the property, Annabel Buffet said: "And on the easel, was proudly displayed our home. Bernard had decided to paint landscapes and interior views [of the property], just like a searching portrait of a loved one... He wanted to capture the atmosphere and the beauty, perhaps to explain the love he felt for the place."

It is worth delving into Buffet's work in the 1980s and 1990s, a period when the artist's paintings were particularly biographical. As such, the artist depicted places he had actually visited and houses that he had lived in, as well as self-portraits. He painted two very important series during this period: Don Quichotte and then Capitaine Nemo. Taken from the literary world, these two solitary characters can be regarded as a continuation of the artist's work on self-portraiture. Indeed, the fact that the artist chose these two subjects underlines the more reclusive life that he led at the time.



Bernard Buffet in front of his studio in Tourtour, Haut-Var
Photo taken by Danielle Buffet, the artist's daughter.

AN EMBLEMATIC PAINTING BY BERNARD BUFFET

Portrayed on numerous occasions, La Baume has become one of the defining symbols of the painter's work. Showing the house and its dovecote, the painting presented here is characterised by a series of black lines that encircle and give geometric form to each of the elements in the composition. The windows are portrayed as black rectangles, as is customary in Buffet's architectural depictions—the artist's windows are always "blind", preventing us from seeing what is going on inside.

The work also features other painting techniques that give the composition a dynamic quality and are typical of the period in the artist's work. For example, the artist used his fingers to paint the trees' leaves in the work, while for tall grasses and bushes, he created beautiful textural effects by crushing the paint tube directly on the canvas. To recreate the wire fence, Buffet scraped through the thick black paint with the other end of his brush. The artist also projected the paint, creating splashes that bring a lot of movement to the work. In this way, Buffet applied the oil paint in thick layers, using agitated, expressionist gestures reminiscent of the later works of Van Gogh.

The composition is presented from an elevated perspective, with all of the plants turned forward to meet the viewer's gaze in a very expressive display. This technique, which originated in Japanese prints, was particularly popular among Impressionist painters. A genius at drawing, Buffet would often distort perspective and scale to create the most readable composition possible for the viewer. The artist chose to let us step into the work along a path, our gaze guided towards the painting's background—as if inviting the viewer to join him in his home..



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(details)
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The Domaine de La Baume, Bernard Buffet's final home, became one of the artist's favourite subjects at the end of his life. Driven by intense creative energy, the artist depicted the house from all angles, rendering it immortal. A place of silence, the home was the ultimate oasis for this tormented artist. As Annabel Buffet explained, "He seemed to have found a refuge in this exceptional place, where he could reconnect with his fondness for the quiet life."